



“A Guide to the Natural Communities of the Delaware Estuary”



FACT SHEET November 2006

WHY THE DELAWARE ESTUARY?

The Delaware Estuary Watershed is comprised of a rich mosaic of natural communities spread across a diverse landscape. Natural communities are unique assemblages of plants and animals that reoccur within specific environmental settings. These unique assemblages can reflect ecological conditions at a scale broader than the species' population, yet more refined than the landscape.

WHAT IS THE NATURAL VEGETATIVE COMMUNITY SYSTEM (NVCS)?

Natural communities in this document refer to the plant association level of the NVCS. The NVCS provides a complete, standardized listing and description of all the vegetation types that represent the variation in biological diversity at the community level. It is a comprehensive system that classifies all terrestrial vegetation in the country under a common framework. It identifies vegetation units based on both qualitative and quantitative data at a scale that is practical for conservation and restoration.

HOW IS IT A TOOL FOR CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION?

Natural communities can address both species and function. In this sense, natural communities can act as barometers of ecological health. Communities such as mixed-oak forests and serpentine barrens, salt marshes, and salt pannes support a wide array of life, and they perform important ecological functions. For example, upland forests help recharge aquifers while lowland wetlands provide natural flood control. When taken as an interconnected whole, the health of our natural communities helps to determine the overall well being of the watershed. When natural communities are threatened, the many species that depend on them for habitat are resigned to a similar fate and the ecological services that would be rendered are lost.

The Guide to the Natural Communities of the Delaware Estuary describes 35 ecological systems and 185 natural community types known to occur in the region. The Guide also contains a cross-walking table between the NVCS classification and the New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware state classification; therefore, assisting in regional resource management, conservation and restoration.

HOW CAN I GET A COPY OF THE GUIDE AND DICHOTOMAS KEY?

Please visit http://www.delawareestuary.org/NVCS/studiesandreports_nvcs.asp to download the information you need. You can also contact Krista Laudenbach-Nelson via e-mail, KNelson@DelawareEstuary.org, or by phone at (800) 445-4935, ext. 111.

This work was made possible with funding from the Delaware Estuary Program (EPA 320 Funding), the William Penn Foundation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Delaware Bay Project.

The Partnership for the Delaware Estuary, a National Estuary Program based in Wilmington, leads collaborative and creative efforts to protect and enhance the Delaware Estuary, and its tributaries, for current and future generations. We envision everyone working together to make the Delaware Estuary the most inviting, prosperous and healthy natural resource of its kind in the nation.